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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000903

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PGOV KPKO ASEC IV
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: GBAGBO REINS IN IDENTIFICATION
PROCESS; REBELS SUSPEND DISARMAMENT

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Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. President Gbagbo has declared that the mobile courts carrying out the identification process can only issue birth certificates, not a second category of identification document that provisionally establishes Ivoirian nationality. In reaction, the rebel New Forces suspended their participation in disarmament. These are two big setbacks for the peace process, and they serve to underscore the transcendent importance of the identification issue for both sides. Prime Minister Banny will not give up, but he certainly has his work cut out for him to keep both sides moving forward toward elections. End Summary.

¶2. (U) President Gbagbo used the occasion of his National Day address to the nation, which he delivered the day before on August 6, to declare that the mobile courts (audiences foraines -- AF), which are attempting to document the approximately four million unregistered Ivoirians and foreigners born in Cote d'Ivoire, have no authority to issue certificates of nationality.

¶3. (C) The certificate of nationality is the second of three steps in the documentation of an unregistered Ivoirian. The first is a birth certificate, which establishes identity. Many adult Ivoirians and foreigners who were born in Cote d'Ivoire never received birth certificates. With a birth certificate and proof that at least one parent is Ivoirian (or proof of naturalization, marriage to an Ivoirian or adoption by an Ivoirian), the person is entitled to a certificate of nationality, which provisionally establishes nationality (unless proven otherwise). The final step is a national identity card, which is definitive proof of Ivoirian nationality. (Note: The controversial new procedure which President Gbagbo and his Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI) party put in place for the issuing of national identity cards was one of the causes of the 2002 coup attempt and rebellion. Since that time there has been no procedure for issuing the identity cards and no new ones have been given.)

¶4. (C) The AF's have been issuing both birth certificates and certificates of nationality. However, in his August 6 speech President Gbagbo asserted that they only have the legal authority to issue birth certificates, and certificates of nationality must be issued by a different kind of court. Gbagbo implied but did not say directly that the some 20,000 certificates of nationality that the AF's have issued so far are invalid.

¶5. (C) Gbagbo also pledged his full support for new

"guidelines" for the AF's, which he said the Council of Ministers had recently approved and which presumably restrict the AF's to issuing only birth certificates. Nahouhou Perrine, the Justice Ministry official in charge of logistical support for the AF's, told us August 9 that the AF's are continuing to function, except in the west, but have stopped issuing certificates of nationality.

¶6. (C) Reacting to Gbagbo's declaration, rebel New Forces (FN) leader Guillaume Soro announced August 8 that the FN have suspended participation in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process. Soro categorically rejected any change in the "rules of the game" for the AF's. He also said the FN would not accept any extension of President Gbagbo's term in office beyond October 30, and called for the issue of an integrated national army to be put at the top of the agenda for the talks between the chiefs of staff of the FN and the Ivoirian Armed Forces (FANCI). An FN press communique issued later that day claimed that Prime Minister Banny had promised the FN that the AF's would be able to issue both birth certificates and certificates of nationality. The communique also emphatically denied that the return of prefects and sub-prefects to rebel-held areas constitutes the administrative reunification of the country, and stated rather that this has only been allowed for the specific purpose of overseeing the AF's. (Note: The Ambassador has requested a meeting with Soro to seek clarification of the FN's stand and to urge him to continue to participate in the peace process.)

¶7. (C) Comment. These are two big setbacks for the peace process. Prime Minister Banny will not give up, and presumably some new procedure will be adopted for issuing certificates of nationality. However, adding another bureaucratic step will significantly delay the identification process and preparations for elections. The FN's return to a confrontational stance is also a very negative development.

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Ever since Prime Minister Banny persuaded Soro in February to resume attending cabinet meetings, the FN have seemed to be consciously trying to appear as cooperative and constructive as possible, perhaps in a deliberate effort to force Gbagbo into the role of spoiler. Jean-Luc Stallone, head of the DDR department at the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI) told us that the very day of Soro's announcement, there was supposed to be an important meeting of the four-party DDR monitoring committee (FN, FANCI, ONUCI and the French Licorne peacekeeping force) to start moving disarmament forward from pre-regroupment to regroupment (when combatants move from being under their own commanders to being under the control of international peacekeepers). That meeting was called off, and DDR has been brought to a halt pending resolution of the AF issue.

¶8. (C) This all serves to underscore the transcendent importance of the identification issue for both sides. Preventing foreigners in the North from fraudulently obtaining Ivoirian nationality has been the most cherished cause of Gbagbo and the FPI since long before they came to power. They are determined if anything to intensify their vigilance to prevent this from happening, no matter how much this delays the elections. (Gbagbo said in his speech that he intends to use his emergency powers under the constitution to extend his term in office as many times as necessary, until there can be "clean, free and fair" elections. He also indicated, as he has before, that he does not believe it is essential to complete the identification process before elections can be held.) The FN, meanwhile, vow that identification was the reason they took up arms in the first place, and they will not lay them down without it. Prime Minister Banny certainly has his work cut out for him to allay the suspicions of both sides and keep them moving forward toward elections. End Comment.

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